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AUTHOR	Bevan-Brown, Jill; Bevan-Brown, Winston
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ABSTRACT

New Zealand's Special Education Policy Guidelines state that a learner's language and culture comprise a vital context for learning and development and must be considered when planning programs. During 1999-2001, surveys and interviews examined whether the needs of Maori students in special education were being met. Over the 3-year period, data were gathered at 619-743 English-medium schools each year. A Maori-developed survey was completed at 32 Maori-medium schools in 1999 and 49 such schools in 2001, and 166 parents of Maori learners with special needs were consulted. The degree of satisfaction with special education policy initiatives varied across initiatives. Relatively few English-medium schools were implementing culturally appropriate programs or provisions for Maori students. Respondents at English-medium schools identified three major challenges limiting schools' responsiveness to Maori students with special needs: lack of parental support and involvement, insufficient funding, and lack of educators with Maori language and cultural expertise. In addition, data indicate that many educators held negative and stereotypical attitudes toward Maori students and parents and discounted the importance of culturally appropriate services. In Maori-medium schools, the major challenges were lack of services in the Maori language, shortage of special educators with Maori language and cultural knowledge, and lack of Maori-relevant assessment measures. Recommendations are suggested for improving special education services for Maori students. (SV)

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HOW ARE MAORI LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS FARING?

Jill and Winston Bevan-Brown

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HOW ARE MAORI LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS FARING?

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Jill & Winston Bevan-Brown

Massey University

Palmerston North

New Zealand

Abstract

Similar to many other ethnic minority groups throughout the world, Maori learners with special needs are over-represented in Special Education. One of the briefs of the Special Education 2000 Research was to investigate whether these Maori learners with special needs were being adequately provided for by the new policy initiatives. This question was posed to Maori parents, teachers in mainstream early childhood centres and schools and to teachers and whanau (extended family) members in kohanga reo and kura kaupapa Maori (total immersion early childhood centres and schools).

Based on the data from this research the presenter will discuss the specific needs of Maori learners with special needs both in mainstream and total immersion contexts and the degree to which these needs are being met. The research showed that policy initiatives vary in their effectiveness for Maori, the least effective being the Severe Behaviour Initiative which is the area of greatest Maori representation. A variety of challenges teachers face in providing for Maori learners with special needs will be presented and some suggestions for meeting these challenges will be made.

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Introduction

"A learner's language and culture comprise a vital context for learning and development and must be taken into consideration in planning programmes." (M oE, 1995).

This statement is principle six of New Zealand's Special Education Policy Guidelines. The extent to which it is being put into practice for Maori learners with special needs is of interest and concern to the Ministry of Education. In contracting the Massey University Research Team to monitor and evaluate the Special Education 2000 Policy, the Ministry of Education requested that the situation for Maori learners with special needs be investigated. The research questions they posed were:

1. Are the specific needs of Maori being addressed adequately by Special Education 2000?
2. If not, what challenges need to be addressed and which methods are appropriate?

Method

Answering these questions required a multi-faceted approach. In New Zealand the majority of Maori learners with special needs are provided for in English-medium education. However, others are educated in Maori-medium facilities including kohanga reo (early childhood centres), kura kaupapa Maori (primary schools) and wharekura (secondary schools). Different data-gathering instruments were needed to accommodate these various educational establishments. Information was gathered from English-medium schools via Maori-relevant questions included in the Phase1, 2 and 3 surveys and from interviews with principals, teachers and teachers aides. For Maori-medium schools, a reference group of kura kaupapa Maori teachers and parents was formed to develop a survey relevant to their particular circumstances. This survey was sent to all kura in New Zealand (70 including satellite schools) in Phase 1 and 3 and a small number of interviews with principals, teachers and teacher aides were also conducted. Finally, approximately 166 parents of Maori learners with special needs were consulted.

The following Table indicates the number of schools and educators involved in this consultation.

Table 1 –SE2000 Research Involvement

Research Measure	English-medium schools		Maori-medium schools	
	No of schools	No of educators	No of schools	No of educators
Phase 1 - Survey	743	1340	32	58
(1999) Interviews	398		7	14
Phase 2 - Survey	665	1226	-	-
(2000) Interviews	288		-	-
Phase 3 - Survey	619	968	49	
(2001) Interviews	-	-	2	2

Results

English-medium schools

Adequacy and Effectiveness of Special Education Policy Initiatives

The research revealed mixed findings over the three year period. Data revealed that while Maori learners with special needs were benefiting overall from the introduction of the Special Education policy, the degree to which their needs were being addressed varied from one initiative to another. For example, satisfaction levels for the Special Education Grant (SEG) and for Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs) rose over the three year period. These initiatives were generally perceived to be working well for Maori learners with special needs. However, other initiatives were achieving only moderate to limited success. The satisfaction levels for the Speech-Language Initiative (SLI), the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (ORRS), Support Services and the Severe Behaviour Initiative (SBI) actually decreased from 1999 to 2001. The largest increase in satisfaction (from 14% in 1999 to 47% in 2001) was for RTLBs, while the largest decrease in satisfaction was for the Severe Behaviour Initiative which fell from 31% to 10% in the three year period. This is a real "good news, bad news" situation as Maori are disproportionately over-represented in both these initiatives.

School programmes and provisions for Maori learners with special needs

Another "good news, bad news" story relates to school programmes and provisions for Maori learners with special needs. The good news is that some schools were providing supportive and innovative programmes for these learners and were using a wide variety of culturally appropriate, effective teaching strategies. The bad news is that these schools were in the minority. In fact, relatively few schools in the research were providing programmes that took students' culture into account or had implemented any new programmes or provisions for Maori learners as a result of the new Special Education Policy.

Challenges to Providing For Maori Learners with Special Needs

Why were people becoming less satisfied with certain special education initiatives and what factors were limiting schools' responsiveness to Maori learners with special needs? Some answers to these questions emerged from the research data. The three major challenges to meeting the needs of Maori learners with special needs identified by respondents were:

1. parent-related factors especially the lack of parental support, involvement and communication;

2. insufficient funding to develop and support programmes and provide students with the assistance they need; and

3. a shortage of special education professionals and teachers with the cultural and Maori language expertise required to work with Maori learners with special needs.

While these challenges were all of considerable concern, their relative importance is interesting. In 1999 and 2000 nine challenges were listed for respondents to rate. The top three challenges were parent-related - the lack of parental support, poor financial circumstances and low educational expectations. The bottom three challenges were school and service-related factors - culturally inappropriate programmes, programmes that did not take students' background into account and the shortage of Maori-relevant resources. In the kura kaupapa Maori surveys these top and bottom ratings were reversed. School and service-related factors were the top three challenges and parent and family factors were ranked at the bottom.

In 2001, schools were not given a preset list of challenges but were asked to list their one greatest challenge. Parent-related factors received almost twice as many "votes" as the second most frequently mentioned challenge - lack of funding. In third place was "service-related factors" such as the shortage of culturally appropriate programmes and resources.

Educators' Beliefs and Attitudes

Apart from the major challenges limiting schools' responsiveness to Maori learners with special needs

identified by educators, the data also showed that many principals, teachers and teacher aides held beliefs and attitudes that were barriers to effective service provision. While quantitative data revealed that the provision of culturally appropriate services was a low priority in many schools, qualitative data provided the reasons why. Many teachers believed that there was no difference between Maori and Pakeha students, that culture was not relevant to special education service provision, that it was not the responsibility of English-medium schools to provide for students' cultural needs and that to distinguish between Maori and Pakeha students in service provision was discriminatory. There was also evidence of significant negative and stereotypical attitudes towards Maori students and their parents, low teacher expectations, and a tendency to blame parents for their children's special needs.

Parental Opinion

Findings from consultation with parents over the three years were also mixed. There were those who were very satisfied with the services their children received, praised the teachers and special education professionals concerned and were completely happy with the cultural content of the programmes provided. At the other end of the continuum, there were parents who were totally dissatisfied with the special education services their children received or complained about them receiving no service at all. They told stories of being disbelieved, their concerns being discounted and their culture being ignored.

Kura Kaupapa Maori

Adequacy, Effectiveness and Use of Special Education Policy Initiatives

Similar to English-medium schools, satisfaction levels in kura kaupapa Maori varied amongst the different initiatives. Also similar was the top-billing of the RTLB and SEG initiatives. RTLB services to kura kaupapa Maori increased from 1.01% of students in 1999 to 2.38% in 2001 (However, the different survey response rates for these years must be kept in mind - 44% in 1999 and 70% in 2001).

The 2001 survey revealed that Special Education Policy initiatives were resulting in some improved educational outcomes for Maori learners with special needs. Although of major concern is the under-servicing in the high and very high needs categories (ORRS, SLI and SBI). These services are targeted to funding 3% of the school population. However, in kura kaupapa Maori only 0.51% in 1999 and 0.69% were being provided for in these initiatives. A number of factors contributed to this under-servicing - a low referral rate, a high decline rate and a low review rate. The low referral rate was not because of a lack of need amongst kura kaupapa Maori students. Rather it was attributed to the amount of paper-work involved, the lack of knowledge about services and referral procedures and the shortage of culturally appropriate services available. It was felt that there was little point in applying for services when those services were either culturally inappropriate or non-existent. As one respondent remarked:

> *I have heard there is only one practising speech language therapist who is fluent in te reo [the Maori language] in the whole of New Zealand. How can one person service all kura and total immersion units!!*

Challenges to Providing for Maori Learners With Special Needs

The major challenges facing effective service provision for Maori learners with special needs in kura kaupapa Maori were the shortage of culturally appropriate special education services in the Maori language, the dearth of special educational professionals with Maori cultural and language knowledge and the shortage of Maori-relevant assessment measures and resources to implement and evaluate special needs programmes. These challenges received top billing in both 1999 and 2001. The 2001 survey also showed that all these challenges were perceived to be increasing in severity. They represented a considerable or major problem in at least 85% of kura kaupapa Maori. This is a significant concern.

As previously noted, the order of challenges in English-medium and Maori-medium schools was reversed. Parental and whanau (extended family) involvement is a fundamental principle of kura

kaupapa Maori. Therefore it is not surprising that parental support, involvement and communication and low parental expectation presented only minor problems. However, the issue of financial hardship is interesting. Kura kaupapa Maori are amongst the "poorest" schools in New Zealand. Most have a decile ranking of 1 or 2. Despite this, financial hardship was a relatively low ranked challenge. The interpretation of this finding is open to conjecture but I personally believe it reflects differing cultural values and attitudes.

Parental and whanau (extended family) involvement

Research data showed that there was an overall increase in parental and whanau involvement across all initiatives. This ranged from a 2% increase in the Speech-Language initiative to a 27% increase in involvement with RTLBs. The latter is not unexpected given that this initiative had the highest number of students and was the one kura were most familiar with.

Gaps in Service Provision

Respondents were asked whether Maori and Pakeha perceptions of special needs differed and if so, whether Maori learners with special needs were missing out on funding and services because of this difference. Seventy two percent believed that there were cultural differences in the perception of special needs while 63% (1999) and 67% (2001) thought that Maori learners with special needs were missing out as a result. One particular area of concern was the lack of help for students in total immersion education who struggled to speak Maori but did not have an identified learning disability. A number of people believed that these students should come under the auspices of special education. As one respondent explained:

> *I find that many new entrants do not have sufficient reo to cope with total immersion although they have been at kohanga reo. It's like ESOL from a Maori perspective. There is low language competency.*

A further concern was the limited nature of services offered. There were requests for whanau-focused, holistic services that included the spiritual dimension.

Discussion

Overcoming the Challenges

The time limit of this presentation prevents detailed discussion of the research findings. Therefore I will focus on just one area, namely, how respondents believed the challenges experienced might be overcome. It is obvious from the previous data that in order for Maori learners with special needs to receive adequate provisions and support in both English-medium and Maori-medium schools, major improvements need to be made. These should concentrate on five areas in particular. They are presented below along with three of the many suggestions for improvements made by research participants.

Immediate measures need to be introduced to:

1. Increase the number of people with the cultural and Maori language expertise needed to provide culturally appropriate special education services

- provide a six month special education course for teachers responsible for special needs in each kura kaupapa Maori;
- second Maori-speaking teachers and teacher aides to work for the Ministry of Education, Special Education division; and
- develop working partnerships of Maori speakers and special education professionals.

2. Increase the number and range of culturally appropriate resources, programmes and services

- employ Resource Teachers of Maori and other proficient Maori language speakers to translate existing material and to develop new resources;
- extend present special education services to be more holistic and empowering of Maori; and
- dedicate a division of the MoE's Special Education services to meeting the needs of Maori-medium educational establishments.

3. Increase parental involvement and support of education in general and special education in particular

- fund schools to run courses to help parents and whanau help their children at home;
- employ a Maori liaison person to act as a go-between in home-school communication; and
- teachers make home visits and support parents by attending out-of-school special needs-related meetings with them.

3. Eliminate educators' detrimental attitudes and beliefs

- utilise Maori role models;
- provide professional development that includes Maori-relevant information, skills and teaches the Maori language; and
- establish a compulsory Maori component in all pre-service teacher and special education training.

5. Increase funding for Special Education

- seek funding from businesses and Maori Trust Boards;
- adjust SEG funding formula for kura kaupapa Maori to acknowledge special circumstances of total immersion education; and
- change ORRS verification criteria to enable more Maori students to be funded.

To summarise, there is no doubt that the Special Education policy and initiatives are benefiting some Maori learners with special needs. However, for principle six of the Special Education Guidelines to be widely visible in practice, attention needs to be given to: developing the cultural and reo expertise of teachers and special education providers; increasing culturally appropriate support and school-based programmes and provisions for Maori learners with special needs; eliminating the negative and uninformed beliefs and attitudes that are disadvantaging Maori learners; and increasing parental involvement and support. These changes are unlikely to happen without a substantial commitment of time, effort and money from all those concerned.

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Printed Name: Jill Bevan-Brown Organization: Massey University College of Education

Address: Dept Learning & Teaching Massey University Private Bag 11 222 Palmerston North – New Zealand. Telephone No: 063569099

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